OUR FAITH

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Purpose:--"To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man."

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Prayer

Let us enter into the silence whence the power and the healing flows. Let us enter into the holy temple of our heart, and close the door to all but God's own messengers of love.

We bless Thee, O God, for Thy messengers of beauty, for softly falling leaves of rainbow colors, for sweet, pure air, for the happy responsiveness of little children, for the loyalty and companionship of our young people, for the beauty of family devotion.

We thank Thee for thy messengers of health and wholeness, for every prayer of faith that lifts us to thy perfect life, for every thought of hope that gives us strength for present tasks, for ministering angels of peace, for Jesus, the son of peace, whose love quickens and heals all who look to him and to his God and our God.

We bless Thee, O God, for Thy messengers of saving power, for thy rays of light that scatter the darkness and fog of our fears, for the new strength that springs up within us when we call to Thee for help, for all the seemingly miraculous events by which Thou dost save us from danger.

And again we bless Thee for our Christ, by whose love we are led.

Amen.

Religion, an Individual Matter

"God enters by a private door into every individual."
—EMERSON

One of the most popular of paintings through the years has been Holman Hunt's "The Light of the World." You have undoubtedly seen the picture many times. It portrays Jesus standing outside a door with a lantern in his hand. Jesus is the light of the world in the artist's mind. The most striking thing about the picture is that there is a knocker on the outside of the door but so far as one can ascertain there is no way to open the door from the outside. It must be opened from the inside where a person heeds the knock on the door of his heart and opens the door that Jesus's spirit might enter into his life.

This painting illustrates very vividly the fundamental truth about religion, that it is an individual thing. Religion is a personal relationship between a man and that power in the universe that seems to be significant and to merit worship and reverence. God enters by a private door into every individual. God does not enter into groups except through individuals. Even in the Quaker worship where the group sometimes senses the presence of God it is but a composite sense of individual feeling of Presence.

There is current in the world today the misconception that religion is a function of groups, that goodness can be legislated by a group called the state, or that there is a virtue in group action that does not ultimately reside in individual action. Some men feel that if a group takes over the state that the state will be beneficent. That is an error, it will be only as good as the composite goodness of all of the individuals. We hear much about group action, and usually social action is conceived as power pressure groups that bring their weight to bear upon unhealthy social situations.

Yet the truth of the matter is that such group action is only significant in so far as

it represents the changed and enlightened visions of the individuals composing that group. Religion does not come about by groups, it comes about one by one. It becomes real as individuals open their own individual selves to the promptings of the universe, when they open their own private door to God, and let the brilliant light of God shine through their individual lives.

We must certainly strive for group action because in this particular age in which we live we are impressed by numbers. In a democratic system we must always be aware of the feelings of the majority. But let us not forget that the real origin of religion is an individual proposition when one man at a time in his own private life opens up his soul to God.

WALTER DONALD KRING

(Minister, First Unitarian Church, Worchester, Mass.)

The Literature of Our Faith

There is a great and an increasing need of more tracts on the history of Unitarianism and the subjects which have always been its chief concern. There has been much literature of late of a promotional character. This literature has a distinct value, but it does not serve those many people who are dissatisfied with the dogmas of revealed religion or the many who are completely separated from all churches and yet are hungry for faith.

Whatever the thought of God, or the absence of the thought, there is a yearning for "the one fixed stake."

The custom of prayer may have lapsed but not the need for it.

Religion may have been too much entangled in worldly ecclesiastical institutions, but religion remains a primary necessity of human life.

Jesus may have been lost in creeds and rituals and organizations, but his manner of life is the greatest single hope for a world of order and progress.

Man has been behaving very badly of late, and our despair cries out for a reaffirmation of what man can do and can be.

We want freedom, but outward freedom is far short of inward freedom.

These are subjects which fill the chapters in the history of Unitarianism, and they are subjects which will always confront the minds of men. Have we not something of supreme value to say on these subjects? Did not Unitarianism grow when our tracts set forth the truth as we behold it on these subjects? These are the subjects upon which my distinguished neighbor, Rufus Jones, is constantly writing, and what he writes multitudes read to their benefit.

I do not plead for a discontinuance of promotional literature but for a much larger output of literature on the essentials of religion, and pure Christianity in particular.

FREDERICK R. GRIFFIN

(Minister Emeritus of First Unitarian Church, Philadelphia, Pa.)

The Meaning of Our Constitution

There is a clear issue before our Unitarian fellowship: Does Paragraph 5 of Article I of the By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association nullify and destroy the clear meaning of Paragraphs 1 and 2? This claim has been made frequently of late. Is it true?

The clear purpose of our American Unitarian Association is carefully stated in paragraphs (1) "To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man"; and (2) "To strengthen the churches which unite in the Association for more and better work for the Kingdom of God."

Paragraph 5 says: "The Association recognizes that its constituency is congregational in tradition and policy, and that nothing in these By-Laws is to be construed as an authoritative test." Is it conceivable that this paragraph nullifies and destroys all the preceding carefully worded statements of purpose in our constitution? Is it reasonable to believe that this paragraph means: We have no purpose at all, no one needs to take seriously anything previously stated about our purpose, and anyone is perfectly free to reject everything in Paragraphs 1 and 2? Does Paragraph 5 mean: We have no fixed purpose at all, it can be changed overnight, or every night, and it can be anything which any official of the AUA wishes to make it,

on any given day? This is the interpretation which Humanists are placing on Paragraph 5! Surely it is an entirely unfair and unreasonable interpretation.

In the second place, one has only to read Paragraph 5 carefully to see that its provisions apply to individual churches—not to officials of the Association! By basing its broad permissiveness upon our "congregational" tradition and policy, Paragraph 5 says that no church shall be excluded by any authoritative test. But it does not say that the officials who are elected to carry out the purposes of the Association (as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2) are excused from all responsibility in promoting the clearly stated purposes, and are thus free to redirect the Association, and pervert its whole history and tradition, by making it into an atheistic humanitarian movement, blatantly denying both God and the Kingdom of God.

Denominational officials have no right to disregard, deny and betray the clearly stated purposes of our constitution. Let us have a rebirth of honesty in the carrying out of our sacred obligations!

HARVEY SWANSON
(Minister, Church of Our Father, Lancaster, Pa.)

Denominational Commentary

The other day a statement came to hand from the headquarters of the American Unitarian Association which commits, or purports to commit, the denomination to the sponsorship of a plan for the formation of a "United Liberal Church" to include ourselves and "Liberal Judaism" and the "Ethical Society."

Perhaps the best use to which the statement can be put is to take it as an illustration of the fact that the American Unitarian Association, as at present constituted, does not respect freedom of discussion.

If freedom of discussion is to be something more than an empty phrase, it must mean that no policy shall be announced until it has been freely discussed by the people affected by it, and an opportunity given of voting for or against it. Such freedom, however, is not guaranteed to us under the present By-Laws of the Association.

No discussion of a new policy can be considered free when the discussion of it only comes after an administrative announcement of its adoption. It is then a **fait accompli.** What may follow cannot be called "free discussion." Approval of the policy may have an element of time-serving in it. Disapproval of the policy is reduced to the status of adverse criticism of an administrative act. This lessens the dignity of the objector's role. And irenic spirits find themselves subject to an inner conflict from which a less authoritarian type of administration would protect them.

The particular policy which is now officially announced—not as a subject of free discussion, but as an official policy—happens to be one that is factious. It goes beyond what the editor of the **Humanist** asked for in September. And it is a policy of special interest to the group that runs this paper. It tells them, with the force of a hammer-blow administered from behind, just how much their convictions are respected at denominational headquarters. And it tells us all that the present dictators of official policy do not consider themselves bound by the Association's current constitutional statement of purpose, a copy of which appears regularly on the title-page of this leaflet.

If there is to be a "United Liberal Church" that is really "united," it will, to say the least, have joint printing enterprises. Committees will sit and work out a liturgy and hymnody and Sunday School material designed for common use. To accommodate ethical culturists, the word "religious" will either, in unscholarly fashion, lose its essential meaning, or, to respect their scruples fully, not be used at all. And the Ethical Society, for its part, is apparently expected to accept the word "Church."

On the immediate question of this policy of joining with Jews and ethical culturists in a "United Liberal Church," there is only one thing a free man can do. He must demand that it be made the subject of a free discussion. It can become that now only by an official announcement withdrawing it as a predetermined administrative policy. Then it can be freely debated and openly voted upon by ministers' groups, regional conferences, and at the Annual Meeting.

On the broader question of our present internal condition, this is due largely to our

denial denominationally of the ideals of free discussion and democratic methods which we cherish personally, and to which our official statements regularly pay lip-service. So long as our denominational machinery is constructed on a pattern that vitiates our ideals, there can be no health in us. The fault is not primarily in our present officeholders. Given a new set of officers, under the present administrative system we may still find ourselves at the mercy of some Jack-in-office. Our disease is not functional; it is organic. And it becomes virulent at approximately ten-year intervals.

Our condition can be healed only by devising a constitution under which appointments and policies will be subject to democratic scrutiny before they are made official. The present challenge confronting the creative spirits in our midst is the formulation and promulgation of new By-Laws based on democratic norms. Their basic principles will be: (1) Election to the denomination's governing council of people chosen by the people in their district to represent them. (2) All nominations to be on the same footing. (At present some are nominated by the "machine," and others, if any, by petition, and the machine is topped by a small nominating committee that nominates itself.) (3) A "listeners' gallery" at deliberations of the governing council and provisions for open hearings. (4) Direct appointment by and direct responsibility to the governing council of each department head and executive assistant. (5) The press free from control by the governing council.

Until we "cleanse first the inside of the cup and platter" by the application of democratic norms to our denominational machinery, we shall be unable to talk of freedom without meriting the accusation of hypocrisy.

ROWLAND GRAY-SMITH
(Minister, New North Church, Hingham, Mass.)

A Word of Warning

Just at the time that our own Humanists within the A.U.A. are trying to persuade us that the future belongs to Humanism, the General Secretary of the Ethical Union of England, who succeeded Stanton Coit at the Ethical Church, London, writes frankly to **The New Humanist:** "There is no great future here for ethical societies or humanist churches."

In Liverpool, of course, the Positivist Temple has long been deserted, save by a small committee who meet in a small room. The auditorium is rented to a spiritualist group!

Is this the happy future to which our Unitarian Humanists are beckoning us onward?

Fulfillment

Voices are calling from the vast eternities,
Calling upon all people and all nations
To arouse from dull despair and to take fresh hope,
Leaving disappointments far behind them
In grand climax of a new world's awakening.
Dream, visions and unfolding purposes are pressing toward fulfillment,
Waiting man's creative deed and high resolve,
With power he had never yet commanded,
To walk in lowly places with exalted spirit,
To serve with God in tasks of new achievement,
And build in neighborly uprightness a world-wide commonwealth.

CHARLES G. GIRELIUS
(Minister, Reformed Christian Church of Trenton, N. Y.)

Worth Quoting

Christianity is not a matter of records and parchments, but a light and a life: which, if a man has it not, no logic can reason into him; and which, if a man has it, no logic can reason out of him. And this is not a question of logic, but a question of experience, which every soul must answer for itself.

FREDERIC HENRY HEDGE
(American Unitarian scholar and preacher, in "Reason in Religion," p. 277.)

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